Start of [The Feuchtwanger Dynasty]. :

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AR 11824 1/1 [The Feuchtwanger Dynasty] circa 1975 Archives

THE FEUCHTWANGER DYNASTY - Only a memory remains ....

In January 1965 a new street was named "Feuchtwangerstrasse" in the northern part of the city of Munich. This in honor of an old patrician family, who has played as significant a part in the history of this city as other old Munich families, such as the Pschorrs, the Sedlmeyrs, the Millers.

The Feuchtwangers have always been true "Bavarians". In the year 1555, when Feuchtwangen, a small town in Franconia, exiled its Jewish inhabitants, there were three brothers among the exiles whose families had been residents of Feuchtwangen since generations. Two of the brothers were murdered on the road. This third was able to make his way to Fuerth, which had had a Jewish congregation since 1528. He is now able to settle down. People call him the "Feuchtwanger" since that's where he comes from. And thus he keeps the name.

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Seligmann Feuchtwanger marries Fanny Wassermann, the daughter of a wealthy financier, in September 1818. The Feuchtwangers have long since become well established businessmen and members of the comfortable Fuerth middle class. A black silk dress is part of Fanny's dowry and she will be wearing it on festive occasions until her death iat 75.

The family has 18 children. Only three die shortly after birth. Nine boys and six girls sleep in bureau drawers; there is no money for 15 beds.

As a silver merchant, Seligmann Feuchtwanger is not least bit interested in wealth and riches, in spite of the number of his children. He thinks of himself as an intellectual, not a businessman. In keeping with his motto "no man can eat more than one chop a day", he closes his shop as soon as his weekly expenses are earned in order to bury himself among his books and folios. A young couple who come to his store to buy wedding bands are sent away with a short "Come back next Shabbath. I've made enough money for this week".

At the turn of the 13th century, Fuerth is a banking center. There are 13 Jewish banks in the small town. For many bankers Fuerth means the start of an international career.

Seligmann Feuchtwanger never dreamed that he might become the patriarch of a family of prominent bankers - and yet, he has nine sons who open nine banks throughout Germany. The blood of their mother's family is strong.

At first, Jakob Loew, the second eldest son, shows no ambition to become a money man. He moves to Munich, where he starts a flourishing vegetable wholesale business. But then he falls in love and marries Auguste Hahn, the daughter of a Frankfurt banker, in 1850. The Hahns are prominent in banking circles - one of them is the founder of the "Frankfurter Effekten- und Wechselbank" and Jakob Loew is exposed to the world of high finance.

His direction now becomes clear. One year after his wedding, he and a partner open their first bank. By 1857 he is able to buy a large house on Promenadeplatz and to open his own bank, "J.L. Feuchtwanger Bank". This bank will remain in the family until its forced sale in 1936.

The Feuchtwanger bank enjoys an excellent reputation. But it remains on the conservative side, no speculations, no risks, no ostenticity in public. The clientele is equally inobtrusive. There are no financial giants or the super rich among them. The Feuchtwanger Bank is for the well established middle class. This policy will prove to be a blessing, from the founding years right through to the turn of the Century. Banks are experiencing hard times. Many go bankrupt, others are able to keep their heads above the water only with great effort. Jakob Loew, with his sons Angelo and Lothar, is among the few bankers who survive the years of crisis untouched. Yet, this is never mentioned; "low key" remains the motto.

Where others are honored with titles and other public recognition, the Feuchtwangers prefer to act in silence: In strict observance of the laws of the Books of Moses, the "Maaser" as it is called in Hebrew, one tenth of their net income is spent on charity. Substantial sums are contributed to nursing and old age homes, orphanages and hospitals, of the city of Munich.

Jakob Loew's oldest son, Angelo, born in 1854, takes over the management of the business in keeping with the established policies. He has eleven siblings: six sisters and five brothers, some of whom, in turn, establish other banks throughout Germany.

Angelo is a true Munich original. Deeply rooted in his beloved Bavarian customs, he can be seen at the Hofbrauhaus daily for his one or two glasses of beer, both morning and evening, before and after his prayers at the synagogue. Since 1912 he is a loyal member of the social democratic party, an unusual affiliation for a banker of his time. He is known for his sense of honesty and justice.

He tells one of his clients openly to his face " You are a liar". When he has calmed down and is asked to take back the fatal word, he insists: "The man is a liar". In order to save face, the client has no recourse but to sue. Once more, lawyers and aides try in vain to persuade Angelo to apologize. No - he insists upon the "liar" - and wins the suit. He is able to prove the lie.

To another client who tells him radiantly how much money he has earned on a speculation he says calmly "You haven't earned anything, you've gambled for it."

Angelo realizes early from which direction the political wind in Germany is blowing. In 1936, three years after Hitler's coming to power, the 82-year old emigrates to Palestine. His sons Theodor and Leo continue the management of the bank for another four years. Then Jews are prohibited from management positions in their own businesses.

By now there are about 150 members of the Feuchtwanger family in Munich; Chief Justice Dr. Max Feuchtwager, father of the world renowned art historian Franz Feuchtwanger, now living in Mexico; publisher and editor Dr. Ludwig Feuchtwanger, whose son Edgar is now a professor at Oxford University in England; dentist, Dr. Heinrich Feuchtwanger, whose huge collection of Bavarian/Jewish art and ritual objects now belong to the treasures of the Bezalel Museum in Jerusalem.

Lawyers, doctors, businessmen - those are the numerous descendants of the former Fuerth resident, Seligmann Feuchtwanger. They all belong to Munich, they're all born here. But now they have to leave...

The greatest urgency to leave Germany exists for the most prominent member of the family: Lion Feuchtwanger. He, too, is one of the many great grandsons of the learned silver merchant. Born at St. Anna Platz, right in the center of Munich, this world renowned writer, Lion Feuchtwanger published his best known novel "Erfolg" in 1930. In it he writes with alarming insight about the political climate in Munich in the Twenties. This book will make him the best hated enemy of the Third Reich.

Lion's family - father Sigmund is an internationally known expert in Jewish literature and collector of Jewish art - has among them many writers, intellectuals and artists. Lion's brother Martin, also a successful writer, describes in his autobiography with nostalgia how Jewish and Christian boys once played together harmoniously in the streets of St. Anna Platz.

In his novel "Erfolg", Lion writes of two Nazis, who, after the unsuccessful "putsch" at the Feldherrnhalle, sought refuge in the offices of a Jewish lawyer in a small side street. This macabre episode is no mere invention. Sigbert Feuchtwanger himself told it to Lion's father - he was the lawyer.

Sigbert Feuchtwanger is not only a well known lawyer, but also author of many prominent legal works and theses, which have been publicly cited until 1942.

Up to the beginnings of the Third Reich, Sgbert's wife, Rhea Glus, a well known choreographer and founder of a distinguished school for physical culture in Schwabing is a fervent follower of the German national heritage. But in 1933 she is the first to defiantly hang out a sign on the door of the school "I am a Jewess". The national socialist Governor of Bavaria, Franz Ritter von Epp, begs her personally to remove the sign. "I determine who is a Jew". Nevertheless, this is the beginning of the end of the Feuchtwnager dynasty in Munich.

Lion emigrates to California, by way of France. His world famous, unique library of valuable first editions must be left behind. In California he is once more able to build up an extraordinary library of rare books, which he purchases at international auctions. Many of the volumes were once before in his possession - in Munich.

Sigbert follows his son, Walter, who had left Germany in 1932, and emigrates with his wife to Israel.

Walter is the first and only Feuchtwanger who returns to Munich after the war. He does so upon the urgning of the head of the House of Wittelsbach, Duke Albrecht. It seems a member of the Feuchtwanger family would be the right person to start cautious economic relations between Germany and Israel.

Shortly after his return to Munich, Walter, a dynamic banker with international experience, opens the W.F. Feuchtwanger Bank KG. In 1970, he merges with the Allgemeine Kreditanstalt. Three years later he retires, but continues in his capacity of financial advisor.

He is the only one of the highly gifted family Feuchtwanger to live and work once again in the Bavarian capital today.

The city bestowed the Literary Prize on Lion, her famous son, in 1957. Lion, who never completely severed his roots to the city of his birth, always spoke of his desire to return one day. But his death put an end to this wish. And Walter Feuchtwanger remains the last Feuchtwanger in Munich. He does not have a son.

About 2000 descendants of Seligmann Feuchtwanger of Fuerth are today scattered through the world.

But in Munich, the only memory of this old Bavarian family, the Feuchtwangers, will be a street in the northern part of the city.

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End of [The Feuchtwanger Dynasty]. :